

Chapter 9. Preparations for Rama's Coronation

Meanwhile, the prince from Kekaya, Bharatha's maternal uncle, approached Dasaratha and said that a long time had elapsed since he had come from his kingdom. "Father is waiting to see me back. He would have been very happy to be present for these festivities. He doesn't know about Bharatha's wedding, and he will be very disappointed when he hears that his grandson's marriage was celebrated in his absence. His disappointment can be assuaged to some extent if Bharatha comes with me now, so that some festivities can be arranged there for his satisfaction and pleasure."

Dasaratha consulted his wives and called Bharatha. "Son! Your maternal uncle, *Yudajit*, came to take you with him from Mithila, but I didn't agree. I learned that your grandfather is very anxious to see you. So make yourselves ready to accompany him," Dasaratha ordered.

Bharatha said, "Father! It would be very good for Satrugna to come with me." So, he was also ordered to prepare to leave.

Moved by his respect toward elders, Bharatha made preparations to leave Ayodhya with his wife. No objections were raised or arguments presented against their leaving. Bharatha was endowed with the highest intellect; besides, he was master of himself, his senses, and desires. Bharatha, Satrugna, and their wives, journeyed quite happily and reached the city of Girivraja. The grandfather was longing to see him and fondle him, and he enquired about the health and happiness of people in Ayodhya. He asserted that they looked exhausted by the long hours of travel and insisted they should rest, and he led them to the residences allotted to them. From that moment, he treated them more affectionately than his own children and paid close attention to their smallest needs.

Though the grandfather cared for their comfort and joy, the brothers appeared to suffer from some secret discontent, for they could not bear separation from their aged father and Rama, who was the very breath of their existence. They conversed among themselves constantly only about Dasaratha and Rama. Off and on, anxiety about the health and welfare of the father tormented them, in spite of themselves, and deprived them of peace of mind.

While their feelings in Girivraja were such, in Ayodhya, not a single moment passed without Dasaratha pining for them. He sensed a void without them. Many times, he asked himself the question, "Why did I send them away? It would have been good if I had not sent them." The four sons were as four arms for Dasaratha. Now he had been deprived of two.

One day, Rama saw his father plunged in thought about the separation from Bharatha and Satrugna. He approached his father and, sitting near him, spoke soft and sweet words, making him happy.

Rama's qualities

Rama was supremely gentle. However harsh others might speak, he used to reply soft and sweet. Though others might do him harm, he never remembered it against them. He sought only to be good and to be of service to them. Whenever he found time, he discussed codes of good conduct and rules of morality with aged monks, revered *brahmins*, and learned scholars. He analysed the mysteries of *Vedantic* thought in simple words and, like an ordinary enquirer, posed problems before pundits for elucidation. The sages and scholars who had mastered the science of spirituality, *Vedanta*, and philosophical enquiry were elated at Rama's elaborations of the knotty points

he himself raised; they praised his intelligence and scholarship in a thousand different ways.

Rama spoke to his subjects even before they spoke to him, so ardent was his love toward them. He lovingly enquired about their welfare and was full of sympathy for them. So the subjects also loved him as their staunchest friend and dearest kinsman, and they revered him for his affectionate interest in them. Rama followed strictly the various rules of living, dictated by tradition, whatever the inconvenience or discomfort. To whomever he spoke he had a charming smile on his face, a merry twinkle in the eye, and lasting sweetness in his words. No one noticed the slightest trace of anger, dislike, despair, or hate in his face.

Rama was the embodiment of compassion and sympathy. He was full of eagerness to rescue those who surrender their wishes to his will. Undesirable habits to which royalty is an easy prey never dared approach him. He was not a victim of the evil habit of garrulity and dalliance. In spite of this, if anyone displayed before him his cleverness in argument, he would never fail to foil him by cleverer counter argument and put him in his place.

He never knew illness of body or anxiety in the mind. He recognised the needs of the people, and even before they represented them to the ruler, he considered the response that could be made and remedied the grievance, after getting Dasaratha's permission and making the ministers interested in the solution. Dasaratha, too, did not obstruct his wishes in any way; he put them into execution the moment he came to know about them. Rama paid attention to even the smallest detail of administration and took adequate precautions to see that problems and complexities did not raise their heads once they had been solved and set right.

Another quality evident in Rama was: He never revealed in advance what he had resolved in his mind. Until it took final shape, no one could make out his will or wish. And his anger, resentment, or satisfaction would never be futile. He would not delay or allow himself to be diverted or deceived. With such supreme characteristics, Rama shone in glory. Dasaratha was delighted, observing the way Rama was winning the love and loyalty of his people. He heard from ministers, priests, and others of the growing popularity of Rama and was thrilled.

Dasaratha decides to give up the throne

One night, Dasaratha was thirsty and wanted a drink of water. He did not like to awaken the sleeping queens, so he poured himself a small cup of water from a jar near the bed. While drinking it, he observed that his grasp was not firm—the fingers were shaking! He had no sleep after that. His mind sank into a variety of thoughts. Finally, he inferred that old age had brought on debility, and he decided that he should no longer rule over the empire. Any attempt to govern the people without strength of limb and will could only spell confusion and calamity. He was counting the minutes, so that as soon as day dawned, he could communicate his resolve to his ministers. At last, night melted away and there was light.

Finishing his morning ablutions and completing his rites of daily worship, he directed the chamberlains to call together the ministers, the leaders of the people, and the priests for a special meeting at the palace. Bowing to the command of the emperor, all whom he wanted gathered very soon and awaited him. Dasaratha fell at the feet of Vasishta and informed him of the happenings during the night and the stream of thought that they aroused in him. He said he had decided to place the burden of imperial administration on Rama. He prayed that no objection be raised against his proposal. He wanted all arrangements to be made soon for the realisation of his desire.

The chief minister, Sumanthra, announced this decision to the gathering; the ministers, courtiers, citizens, priests, and scholars who were gathered there acclaimed the news with joyful approbation. They cheered, "O most

auspicious! How fortunate we are!”. Their applause reached the heavens.

Vasishta rose from his seat. “Emperor! you need not worry over this in the least. Rama is fit in every way for this great role. But we can well afford to wait a little and celebrate it on a grand scale, inviting all those whom we wish to be present. I suggest that we wait for a month or two, so that Rama’s coronation is done as magnificently as we would like to.”

But Dasaratha exclaimed, “*Mahatma!* Nothing is beyond your ken; you are omniscient. When the king loses strength of limb, he does not deserve to hold the reins of high office. It is a bad sign when a king, whom old age has debilitated, entertains the greed to continue on the throne. It indicates avarice in the heart. Knowing all this, if I oppose it, I would have failed in the duty I clearly envisage. Pardon me; do not try to adjourn this ceremony. Grant me permission to appoint Rama as the heir-apparent (*yuvaraja*) within the next two or three days.” He pleaded thus, in great humility and with deep reverence.

Vasishta lifted Dasaratha up and conferred blessings on him. “O King! Rama’s wedding also happened on the spur of the moment! It dropped from heaven as grace. So the people of the kingdom, your subjects, had no chance to share in the joy of that momentous occasion. If the coronation is also resolved upon and celebrated suddenly, it would pain not only the rulers of many parts of this land, but, even more, would be a source of great sorrow for Bharatha and Satrughna. And Janaka, who has become your kinsman and friend, might not be able to attend! I suggest that you ponder these considerations before settling the date.”

The chief among the ministers then rose. “May the revered family preceptor pardon me! The decision of the emperor has the appreciation and approbation of everyone. Ramachandra is, as the name indicates, as the moon, which repels the burning heat and restores coolness and comfort to all. He removes the pain caused by hate, malice, greed, and envy. There should be no delay in crowning him as the heir-apparent (*yuvaraja*), for whatever reason. Please issue necessary orders in this behalf, O Emperor! I pray for this on behalf of the entire population of this empire.”

Vasishta couldn’t hold onto his attitude any longer. He said that it was necessary to know what the people themselves thought about it. At this, Dasaratha stood up and, with one sweep of his eye, looked at the ministers, leading citizens, pundits, and priests, as well as others of the vast assembly. The assembly was acclaiming the auspicious proposal in a voice of thunder.

In the midst of the excitement, one citizen, who belonged to a very important group, rose and exclaimed, “*Maharaja!* The mighty emperors of your line fostered us, the subjects of this empire, as if we were their own children. This Kosala realm attained prosperity and peace through the care and affection of Ikshvaku. Your eldest son Rama is rich in virtue, highly devoted to the ways of righteousness, as heroic as the chief of gods. More than all, he has the ability to rule over the three worlds. It is indeed our good fortune that you entertain the idea of crowning him as heir-apparent. This is undoubtedly our fortune.”

When the citizen spoke thus, on behalf of all the subjects of the realm, Dasaratha addressed the gathering. “Members of this assembly! All these years, I have ruled over this empire along the path laid down by my forebears and guarded its welfare and prosperity to the best of my abilities, with a sincere desire to promote the good of the entire world. All the years of my life I have spent under the shade of this white umbrella that is over my throne. I am now an old man. I have realised that the vigour and vitality of these limbs have declined. This dilapidated body has to be given a little rest. I have decided on this.

It is not an easy task, not an insignificant mission, to rule over a kingdom, for it calls for dedication of oneself to *dharma*. *Dharma* can be maintained unbroken in the running of the government only by one engaged in constant spiritual practice and who is endowed with rigorous control of the senses. I have borne this burden so long that I am exhausted with the effort. If all of you approve and appreciate my plan, I will tell you all about it. I will never act against your desires and preferences.

“There is no pressure on you; do not fear that I am forcing my wishes on you, or that this is a royal command that you have perforce to obey. I leave you to your own free will and judgement. In case some other arrangement strikes you as more beneficial, you are at perfect liberty to present it before us for candid consideration. Therefore, confer among yourselves and inform me by nightfall what you have agreed upon.”

Even before Dasaratha concluded his address, the assembly became restive and excited, as a flock of peacocks under a cloud-ridden sky that promises copious thundershowers! They shouted aloud their assent, gratitude, and joy, in unmistakable terms. “You desire just what is our own desire. We don’t want any other gift; give us this gift. O this is indeed great good fortune. O hurrah! Crown prince (*yuvaraja*) Ramachandra *jiki* hurrah hurrah!” Dasaratha Rama.” The acclamation rent the firmament.

Dasaratha was tossed between joy and apprehension. He stood petrified by this spontaneous outburst of loyalty and affection. Recovering composure after some time, Dasaratha gazed upon the assembly and spoke. “Members of this assembly! No task is more important to me than acceding to your wishes. I shall, without fail, crown Rama as the heir-apparent. But I have some little apprehension, too. I want to explain it to you and receive from you consolation on that point. I want you to tell me your correct assessment and give me the satisfaction I crave.

While I was about to lay before you the proposal to crown Rama as heir-apparent, even before I spoke about it, you proclaimed that I must crown him without fail and that he had unbounded capabilities to rule over this realm efficiently and well. Looking this fact in the face, it is obvious that you are a little dissatisfied with my rule, or that some of my laws are against your interests or inclinations. Or did I exhibit any tendency opposed to *dharma*? Are you yearning for the coronation of Rama as heir-apparent because you doubt my ability to govern you for your good? Please point out my faults or the errors I have committed, fearlessly and fully. I welcome this frank recital.”

One of the people’s leaders rose and replied. “Rama’s capacity and intelligence are beyond description. And you, O king, are equal to the God of Gods; you are like Sankara, with the same divine compassion and readiness to confer whatever is asked on behalf of the subjects. You are Vishnu in your ability to protect us. We would be awfully vile and wicked to cast aspersions on your rule. Those who do so are atrocious sinners. You have arrived at this resolve because you are eager to do us good and are anxious to make us happy. We obey unquestioningly your command.”

Dasaratha, thrilled with the excitement of anticipation, turned to the chief priest. “O greatest of *brahmins*, you heard the expression of the wishes of the people. Don’t delay any further; collect all the materials and ritual requirements for the coronation ceremony. Erect the enclosures and platforms prescribed by the scriptures for the component rites, sacrificial sites, and other sacred structures.”

He fell at the feet of the family preceptor, Vasishta, requesting him to supervise the process. “Master! All those who can make it will be present; let’s not wait for those who have to come from afar. They can derive equal joy when they hear that Rama has been crowned. Don’t suggest, as a reason for postponement, the need to invite

and wait for the Kekaya ruler or Janaka. Grant permission to have the holy rite of coronation performed as early as possible,” he pleaded and prayed with folded hands.

“*Maharaja!*” Vasishta responded, “I have everything ready; we can get going as soon as you want. I directed that the hundred sacred pots, the tiger skin, the covered sacrificial enclosure with its adjuncts, the materials laid down in the scriptures for the rituals of worship, the herbs and flowers, will all be available by dawn tomorrow.

“Nor is this all. I have intimated the four wings of the armed forces to be in good trim; and also the elephant, Satrunjaya, the one with every auspicious mark that the scriptures (*sastras*) lay down, to be caparisoned most magnificently. The white umbrella of splendour and the royal flag of the imperial dynasty will also be ready at the palace. The auspicious moment has been selected: tomorrow.” When Vasishta announced the good news, the populace was overcome with grateful ecstasy and leaped in joy.

The roads were scrupulously swept and cleaned. Elaborate designs were painted on them and on the walls and buildings facing them. Festoons were hung, and arches, awnings, and shades were erected over the roads; every citizen was busy and happy. The entire city was working fast and excitedly. The *brahmins* and the leading citizens took leave of Dasaratha and emerged from the palace, a veritable stream of exhilaration and excited conversation. The ministers and Vasishta proceeded to the inner halls with the emperor.

Dasaratha sent for Rama. Meeting him in the court hall, he explained to him all the ceremonial formalities and rituals connected with the coronation. He reminded him to be ready before sunrise, and described the preliminaries he had to observe.

Lakshmana heard the news. He ran toward Kausalya, the mother, to convey the joyful tidings and communicate his exultation. She couldn't contain her happiness and waited for Rama to appear before her. There was little time before them, so the entire city was agog with excitement. The villagers around for miles, and even neighbouring states, knew of it pretty soon, for good tidings spread quick and fast. And no one waited for another; no sooner did he hear than he hurried forward to the capital city. The flow of humanity along all the roads leading to Ayodhya became an uncontrollable surge.

Ramachandra listened to Dasaratha explaining details to him but did not reply; his feelings were beyond words. He could not express what passed in his mind, so he stayed silent.

Dasaratha accosted him. “Son! why don't I see any sign of joy in you at the prospect of being crowned tomorrow as heir-apparent (*yuvaraja*)? Don't you want to become heir-apparent? Or is it a sign of anxiety or fear that we are placing the burden of the state on your head?”

In spite of long questioning and fond appeals, Rama appeared tongue tied before the emperor. At last, he said, “Father! I don't understand why you are acting in such a hurry. My dear brothers, Bharatha and Satrugna, are not here. Grandfather is far away and may not be able to reach in time. Father-in-law also might not be able to come. And rulers of other states, princes, and vassal kings may also find it difficult to attend. My mind is heavy because we are disappointing such large numbers of people. It does not accept the idea of celebration when so many are certain to feel pained.” Pleading pardon for his sentiments, he fell at the feet of Dasaratha.

It was Vasishta who replied. “Rama! These objections were raised even by us; don't think that we quietly acceded to the wish of the emperor. We thought of all the arguments for and against, and we consulted the opinion of the people before we decided. Don't raise any objection now; respect the wish of the emperor. The coronation

and anointment have to take place tomorrow. You have to observe certain vows; this day you should not use a cot or a soft bed. You and Sita must fast. As soon as day breaks, after applying sacred oil on your heads, you must both take a bath, for the auspicious star Pushya, which has been selected for the holy rite, rises at that time. So retire into your residence now, without demur.”

As soon as the preceptor finished, Rama fell at the feet of his father and Vasishtha and proceeded to his palace, accompanied by Sumanthra, the trusted minister. He had no hesitation this time. He conveyed the news to Sita and then moved on fast to the apartments of his mother. He prostrated before her; she raised him tenderly and fondled him affectionately, overwhelmed with joy; she directed him to give away cows that she had collected for the purpose and decorated with costly ornaments to *brahmins*, as a mark of thanksgiving. She made Rama give many other varieties of gifts to others.

Lakshmana and his mother were there. Kausalya had Rama seated by her side, and, wiping away feely flowing tears of joy, she said, “Son, I waited a long time for this precious moment, and my yearning is now fulfilled. I am happy; my life is rendered worthwhile. O dearest jewel! My golden son! Beginning tomorrow, you are the heir-apparent! Live long. Rule over the empire. Let the welfare of the people be ever your ideal. May your rule be happy and secure, in accordance with the dictates of justice and morality. Accumulate untarnished fame and maintain the reputation and glory earned by the kings of this line. Attain might and majesty more than even your father. The day you achieve that position, I will feel that my life has attained fruition; my vows, fasts, and vigils will have then borne fruit.”

Kausalya, the mother, caressed Rama, stroked the curls of his hair, and spoke sweet words of benediction. She gave him very valuable counsel, to which Rama paid meticulous attention. Rama chuckled at Lakshmana and teased him in innocent fun. “Brother! Can you tell me which goddess of the kingdom (*Rajyalakshmi*) will be delighted at this lovely taunt?”

Lakshmana retorted, “Brother! I need no goddess of the kingdom to wed me. In your kingdom, if you assign me any responsibility, I shall fulfil it; that is enough fortune for me.” With that, he prostrated at Rama’s feet!

Rama said, “Lakshmana! You are my breath, so half the responsibility of governance is yours. So, you should also get ready, with me, wearing jewels and regal robes. You have a half share in my burdens and in my happiness, fame, and fortune. You have a half share in all that I am and will.”

While Rama was speaking, Sumitra was shedding tears and showering blessings on both Rama and Lakshmana. “Rama,” she said. “The love that subsists between you and Lakshmana gives me great happiness. My son needs no higher status than being your servant. It is enough for him to have your love and affection forever.”

When she finished, Rama fell at the feet of the mother and rose. Lakshmana did the same and accompanied Rama to his palace. The vow of ritual fast was begun by Rama at nightfall. He lay upon a mat made of the sacred kusha grass.